

# The Temple in Flames

The Story of the Last Battle

גרשון בר-כוכבא ואהרן הורביץ

עורך: אייל מירון



MEGALIM  
CITY OF DAVID - ANCIENT JERUSALEM

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## The Temple Courts Are Soaked in Blood

**“But why was the Second Temple destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause.” (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 9b)**

Despite the looming Roman menace, full-fledged civil war persisted. Together with his supporters, Eleazar ben Simon, the Zealot leader who had been demoted to Johanan’s second-in-command, decided

to leave Johanan’s camp, and with his supporters took over the inner courtyard of the Temple and placed his weapons over the gates of the Temple courts. Now the people were divided into three factions: Simon bar Giora controlled the Upper City and parts of the Lower City, Johanan of Giscala controlled the Temple Mount, and Eleazar ben Simon had control of the Temple and its courts. This meant that Johanan had the advantage of height in fighting Simon bar Giora, his main adversary, but meanwhile his troops were attacked from behind by Eleazar’s forces, who were based in the inner court of the Temple, some 20 meters (60 feet) above ground level on the Temple Mount. All three factions suffered numerous casualties; the Temple Mount was defiled with blood and corpses.



The fighting between the groups was merciless and included the use of war engines that had fallen into rebel hands during Cestius Gallus's retreat. Despite the civil war, the Temple worship went on, but the stones and arrows fired from siege engines reached the altar itself, striking priests and offerings alike. Corpses of priests and worshippers lay mixed together; the blood of the fallen pooled in the Temple courts. During the mutual attacks, Johanan and Simon bar Giora set fire to homes in which grain and other supplies had been stored for the use of the householders. As Josephus described it:

The result was that all the environs of the Temple were reduced to ashes, the city was converted into a desolate no-man's-land for their domestic warfare, and almost all the corn, which might have sufficed them for many years of siege, was burnt up. Through famine certainly the city fell, a fate which would have been practically impossible, had they not prepared the way for it themselves (*War* V.25–26).

The Babylonian Talmud describes wealthy people of Jerusalem who could have fed the city for many years during a siege:

There were in it three men of great wealth, Nakdimon b. Gorion, Ben Kalba Sabu'a, and Ben Zizith Hakeseth. Nakdimon b. Gorion was so called because the sun continued shining for his sake. Ben Kalba Sabu'a was so called because one would go into his house hungry as a dog [*keleb*] and come out full [*sabea*].

Ben Zizith Hakeseth was so called because his fringes [*zizith*] used to trail on cushions [*keseth*]. Others say he derived the name from the fact that his seat [*kise*] was among those of the nobility of Rome. One of these said to the people of Jerusalem, "I will keep them in wheat and barley." A second said, "I will keep them in wine, salt, and oil." The third said, "I will keep them in wood . . ." These men were in a position to keep the city for twenty-one years.

The Biryonim were then in the city. The rabbis said to them, "Let us go out and make peace with them [the Romans]." They would not let them, but on the contrary said, "Let us go out and fight them." The rabbis said, "You will not succeed. And it is best for us to wait until the siege is lifted." They then rose up and burnt the stores of wheat and barley so that a famine ensued. (Babylonian Talmud Gittin 56a)

On the morning of Passover eve, 14 Nissan 70, Johanan began to reposition the towers he had built facing Eleazar. But just then the Jews of Jerusalem were shocked to discover that the Romans had arrived and were closing in on the city. In Josephus's words:

The mutual dissension of the factions within the town, hitherto incessantly at strife, was checked by the war from without suddenly bursting in full force upon them. The rival parties, beholding with dismay the Romans forming there several encampments, started a sorry alliance (*War* V.71–72).

The Romans were also stunned — at the spectacular sight of Jerusalem and the Temple. In the famous words of the Jewish sages of the period, “Ten measures of beauty descended to the world; nine were taken by Jerusalem” (Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 49b). Without a doubt, Herod’s greatest building project had been the renovation and expansion of the Temple Mount and the Temple. It was not without reason that people said at the time, “He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building” (Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 4a).

Josephus described it:

The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of the purest white (*War* V.222–223).

The renowned Roman geographer Pliny the Elder described Jerusalem as “by far the most famous city of the East” (*Natural History* V.70). The powerful impression made by the Temple is also evident from a discussion regarding the fate of the sacred shrine held later in Titus’s headquarters, a few days before the Roman conquest. The Romans who opposed burning down the Temple argued that the building was sacred and more magnificent than any other man-made building ever built (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle*).

## Passover 70<sup>CE</sup>

# For the Liberation of Zion: The Romans Prepare for Battle

At this point, let us survey the forces that were involved in the siege of Jerusalem.

### *The Roman Forces*

The political upheaval in Rome had led to changes in the makeup, structure, and quality of the forces operating in Judea. The force that arrived in Jerusalem in 70<sup>CE</sup> was not the same one that had fought earlier under Vespasian in the Galilee. Some of the soldiers who had fought with him had been transferred to Italy during the civil war there and had never come back. In their place, according to Josephus, two thousand legionaries from the Twenty-Second Legion Deiotariana and the Third Legion Cyrenaica were brought from Egypt, and three thousand soldiers were brought from the Euphrates, that is, from the legions of Syria. Troops were also sent by client kings, since one of the obligations of these rulers, usually appointed from among local peoples conquered by the Romans, was to raise an army to assist Rome as needed.

The table following shows all the troops under Titus’s command at the time.

Force	No. of Troops
Four legions (5, 10, 12, 15)	19,000
Legions from the Euphrates and Egypt (2,000 + 3,000)	5,000
Large auxiliary force from Syria	Approximately 21,000
Reinforcements from client kings	Approximately 20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>Approximately 65,000</b>

The decision to give Titus command of the Roman forces stemmed from political rather than professional considerations. At such a sensitive time, when Vespasian was preoccupied with consolidating his new regime, he needed someone on whom he could utterly depend to take charge of the largest military forces in the Empire. There was no more suitable person for this task than his own son, Titus. The latter's lack of professional skill did not worry Vespasian, nor did his son's youth, since Titus was surrounded by experienced and talented men, among them Titus's military adviser, Tiberius Julius Alexander, who according to Josephus had years of experience in this capacity (*War* V.46). Tiberius became a senior commander in the battle for Jerusalem.

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**Tiberius Julius Alexander**, scion of an Alexandrian Jewish family, served as procurator of Judea from 46 to 48<sup>CE</sup>. His loyalty, abilities, experience, and advanced age earned him the important office of adviser to Titus.

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The battle-hardened legions had been subjected to changes in command and makeup. Let us take a look at the legions involved in the fighting.

### *Fifth Legion Macedonica*

The commander of the legion from 67<sup>CE</sup> was Sextus Veturinus Cerialis, who had taken part in the earlier battles and had a wealth of military experience. In addition to his role in the conquest of the Galilee and the experience he had amassed in the sieges of Jotapata and Gamla, he had accomplished other missions for Vespasian: With six hundred cavalry and two thousand infantry, he had quickly and efficiently vanquished the Samaritans who had deployed on Mount Gerizim (*War* III.310–315). He had also conquered the Judean lowlands and Idumea, in the heart of which was the city of Hebron (*War* IV.552–554).

### *Tenth Legion Fretensis*

The commander of the Tenth Legion in the battle for Jotapata and Gamla was Marcus Ulpius Traianus, and in the battle for Jerusalem, it was Larcius Lepidus Sulpicianus (*War* VI.237), who had previously served as quaestor. (During the imperial period, quaestors usually served as financial administrators under the provincial governors or were responsible for the legion's funds). The change in command of the legion was made sometime between July 69 and early 70; the new commander lacked military experience, having been promoted before he had even held the office of military tribune. Unlike its commander, the

legion itself had seen a great deal of action during the siege at Jotapata and Gamla. A force of two thousand soldiers from the legion and one thousand horsemen from auxiliary units took part in the conquest of Jaffa (*War* III.289–306). We may assume that the legion took part in the operational movements of Vespasian and Placidus in Perea (Transjordan) and in the Jericho area, where they were stationed until the siege of Jerusalem. Placidus had acted resolutely against the rebels in the western Galilee back in the time of Cestius Gallus and had won the confidence of Vespasian, who gave him additional assignments that he carried out successfully.

### ***Fifteenth Legion Apollinaris***

The commander of the legion was Marcus Tittius Frugi, who replaced Titus, apparently after the conquest of Gamla. The legion took part in the siege of Jotapata and Gamla, and its soldiers were among the first troops to enter those two cities. The Fifteenth also helped take Jaffa and may have participated in Vespasian's campaign in Samaria.

### ***Twelfth Legion Fulminata***

The commander of the legion at the time of the defeat of Cestius Gallus in 66<sup>CE</sup> was Caesennius Gallus. By 70<sup>CE</sup> the legion probably had a new commander, but his name is missing from Josephus's list of those attending the council of war before the destruction of Jerusalem. Between 66 and 70<sup>CE</sup> the legion had likely rehabilitated itself, drafting new soldiers and undergoing further training.

The legion was commanded by a legate, who was appointed by the emperor himself. He was a member of the senatorial class who had held military and civil posts in the past. Usually, the legate was in his thirties and held the post for three to four years. Six military tribunes served at legion headquarters.



### ***An Expeditionary Force from Egypt***

The commander of this force, consisting of units from the Third Legion Cyrenaica and the Twenty-Second Legion Deiotariana, was Gaius Haterius Fronto. Some of the units in the Third Legion had taken part in the campaign of the Roman General Corbulo against the Parthians in 63<sup>CE</sup>.

Some of the auxiliary units that had been with Vespasian were left as garrisons in vanquished places; not all came to take part in the siege of Jerusalem. The units were reinforced by auxiliaries from Syria that were untried in significant battles, if any at all, against the Jews.

### ***Jewish Forces***

The Jewish rebels had never fought in a regular army, had no professional training, and were not armed with standard weapons. They had come together as a unit under the leadership of a man whose personality and authoritative nature attracted people willing to fight. They waged guerilla warfare, fighting in small, swift, and versatile groups rather than regular forces. This guerilla warfare enabled them to confront a large, organized regular force.

Josephus's account reveals that the rebels used swords, daggers, and clubs, as well as captured weapons. We may assume that they had slingshots, bows, spears, and javelins taken as booty, and that they manufactured their own improvised arms. They probably also protected themselves with improvised shields and body armor. But it was frequently their fighting spirit and determination that enabled them to overcome the Romans' superior expertise. According to Josephus, the rebels' tactical command was good; in fact, they had the upper hand in almost all their face-to-face encounters with the Romans.

There were some 23,400 Jewish fighters in Jerusalem: fifteen thousand under Simon bar Giora (including

five thousand Idumeans) and 8,400 under the command of Johanan of Giscala (of whom 2,400 were Zealots, Eleazar ben Simon's men).

### ***Titus Escapes Death Near the Walls of Jerusalem***

Titus left Caesarea and advanced south by way of the Samaritan hill country. Although Vespasian had already conquered the area and left garrisons behind, Titus seems to have proceeded cautiously in keeping with Roman tactics in enemy territory. Heading up the force were the client kings' battalions and the entire auxiliary. They were joined by the cavalry and the legions. In other words, the force moving with Titus was unquestionably designed to respond to various threats on the way. Titus moved ahead and bivouacked about 5.5 kilometers (3.4 miles) north of Jerusalem.

In complete contrast to his cautious progress, Titus now advanced toward the walls of Jerusalem with only six hundred horsemen, and with no infantry or armor, through an area no doubt under Jewish control, where they were highly likely to encounter guerrilla fighters. Josephus noted that this patrol had two purposes. The first was to reconnoiter and collect intelligence on the city's fortifications. The second was to test the mettle of the Jews, to see if the mere sight of Titus might terrify them into surrendering.

But the reconnaissance force was unsuitable in terms of structure and organization, intelligence-gathering, and deterrence. It could not properly respond to an



almost-certain encounter with the enemy, which did indeed take place. The Jews emerged from the walls and with relative ease were able to cut off Titus and a handful of his men from the rest. Titus escaped by the skin of his teeth, but two of his horsemen were killed by the rebels (*War* V.65).

Titus's rash action almost cost him his life, but thanks to his courage, he managed to escape, albeit without accomplishing his goal. Nevertheless, he was able to learn a great deal from the incident about the level of motivation of the city's defenders and their *modus operandi*: swift, powerful, surprise forays by guerilla

fighters outfitted with light arms (bows and arrows, slingshots, swords and daggers).

### *The Choke Hold Tightens*

Before the Passover eve battle, Titus moved his legions forward and ordered them to camp. The Fifteenth and Twelfth legions camped together in the Mount Scopus area, some 7 stadia (about 1.2 kilometers – 0.75 miles) from the city. The Fifth Legion, which had marched all night up the Beit Horon ascent, encamped 3 stadia (about 0.5 kilometers) north of the Fifteenth and Twelfth. The Tenth Legion bivouacked 6 stadia (about



Legionaries setting up camp; their weapons (helmets, shields, swords and spears) are arranged in back and at right.

1 kilometer – 0.6 miles) east of the city on the Mount of Olives. On that side of the city was another natural obstacle, the Kidron Valley. Setting up encampments was a known weak point, and protection for the forces busy creating a moat, embankment, and other elements of a camp had to be taken into consideration. The Roman writers Vegetius (*Concerning Military Matters* 3.8), Onasander (*Strategikos* 8.1), and Tacitus (*Histories* III.26) all mention this point and recommend that infantry and horsemen be at the ready while such work is underway, in case of attack.

Indeed, what Vespasian had avoided in his earlier sieges in the Galilee happened to Titus in the battle for Jerusalem. The rebels charged from the city shouting war cries. They crossed the Kidron Valley, climbed the Mount of Olives, and surprised the soldiers of the Tenth Legion, who were in the midst of setting up camp, their battle readiness at its lowest point. The attack caused them to flee in every direction.

[The Jews] dashed out suddenly against the Tenth Legion, and racing across the ravine with a terrific shout, fell upon the enemy while engaged upon his fortifications. The latter, to facilitate their work, were in scattered groups and to this end had laid aside most of their arms, for they imagined that the Jews would never venture upon a sally .... (*War* V.76).

When Titus received word of the incident, he attacked the Jewish fighters' flank with auxiliary battalions, pursuing them down the slope of the Kidron.

## Burial Places of the Jerusalem Aristocracy

### The Kidron Valley Tombs

The Mount of Olives has been the most important cemetery in Jerusalem since antiquity. In the Kidron Valley, at the foot of the mountain, lie three monumental tombs of the city's priestly aristocracy from the Second Temple period. The tombs are masterpieces of ancient architecture, skillfully sculpted out of the mountain and decorated with classic motifs from both eastern and western cultures.

The earliest tomb, created in the Hasmonean period, belongs to the house of Hezir. This was a priestly family whose ancestors served in the First Temple (I Chronicles 24:15) and which played an important role in establishing the Second Commonwealth when Jews returned from the Babylonian exile.

The tomb is carved out of the mountain in the shape of a cave. Two robust pillars capped by Doric capitals stand at the cave entrance, lending the tomb façade the appearance of a Greek temple. Inside the cave, niches were carved to hold the ossuaries in which the bones of the dead were interred.

The names of the interred are inscribed in Hebrew letters on the lintel above the two pillars. The inscription, found by French scholar Félicien de Saulcy in 1854, mentions both a *kever* (the actual grave) and a *nefesh* (a symbolic memorial to the soul), although the *nefesh* has not been firmly identified.

The inscription on the tomb of the house of Hezir reads, "This is the grave and the *nefesh* of Elazar, Hania, Joezer, Judah, Simon, [and] Johanan, sons of Joseph son of Oved, [and] Joseph and Elazar, sons of Hania, priests of the house of Hezir."



The Monument of Zechariah (right) and the Tomb of the House of Hezir

### The Tomb of Zechariah

The tomb of Zechariah is an aboveground monolith chiseled completely out of stone. The monument consists of an Egyptian-style pyramid astride a solid square base decorated with classic Roman columns and capitals. Thus the structure fuses east and west. Since no one could be buried inside the solid monument itself, it must have served as the *nefesh*. The *kever* itself remains unknown.

A medieval Jewish tradition links the tomb to Zechariah son of Jehoiada, a First Temple-period priest and prophet who was brutally murdered in the Temple court by Joash, king of Judah (II Chronicles 24:20–21). According to tradition, the killing occurred on the holy day of Yom Kippur, which was on the Sabbath that year. The relentless "boiling blood" of the prophet came to symbolize the moral decline that led to the destruction of the First Temple. It was customary in previous generations to gather at the tomb on the Ninth of Av to request forgiveness from Zechariah and pray for the speedy rebuilding of the Temple.

### Absalom's Pillar

The best-known of the three tombs is Absalom's Pillar. Tradition attributes the statuesque monument to David's renegade son Absalom, who staged a coup d'état in an attempt to usurp his father's rule. Absalom was killed by David's commander-in-chief Joab when his long hair became embroiled in the branches of an oak tree. The Bible states that Absalom had built a memorial for himself before his death in the Valley of the Kings (II Samuel 18:18), and since the Middle Ages, the pillar in Kidron has been believed to be that. Absalom's brazen character inspired the custom of bringing ill-behaved offspring to the site to warn them of the unpleasant fate awaiting children who rebel against their parents. This rite would conclude with the stoning of the monument — a practice that led to its submergence under a huge pile of small stones, which was cleared only in the twentieth century.

As in Zechariah's tomb, the base of Absalom's Pillar is square and chiseled out of the rock. It too is decorated with Roman

pillars and capitals. It differs, however, in its interior, which was hollowed out to make room for burial inside the structure. The entrance into the compound was from the upper part of the base on the southern side, reached by a short wooden bridge from the adjacent cliff.

The tomb roof consists of a concave cone rising up from a circular base. This may well have been the *nefesh*. The broken tip at the top of the cone probably held the stone relief of a lotus flower. The true identity of the tomb's owners is unknown, but there is little doubt that they were part of the priestly aristocracy of the late Second Temple period. The adjacent tomb, known as the Cave of Jehoshaphat, displays a stone lintel with intricate carvings of acanthus and grape leaves. This was apparently the burial place of the later members of the family.

Absalom's Tomb



Titus learned his lesson. From then on, he stationed auxiliary battalions as a buffer to allow the legion to encamp without disruption. But he was not properly prepared for the magnitude of the next assault, nor did he station enough troops to counter it. The Jews charged through the auxiliaries' ranks with a backup force and once again caused the legionaries to flee. Titus found himself once more cut off from the main body of his troops. But when the legionaries saw he was in danger, they rallied and pushed the Jews back down to the valley (*War* V.86–87).

When the battle for Jerusalem began, the Roman campaign was suffering from a mistaken assessment of the Jews' fighting capabilities and from a lack of coordination due to Titus's meager experience in commanding large forces. Moreover, the Roman high command did not take advantage of the experience and knowledge gathered in the battle for the Galilee and in the early fighting in Jerusalem. Vespasian, as noted, was aware of Titus's lack of experience and expertise, and he therefore gave him advisers. Titus, however, acted in accordance with his own understanding and character, which were found lacking. Titus may have realized the danger to the entire operation if he were to be hit, yet he remained in the vanguard and fought like a soldier, contrary to the counsel of his advisers (*War* V.88–89).

With the Jewish attack repulsed, the Romans were able to finish setting up their camps.

***Passover: Men Devour Each Other Alive***

Despite the arrival and deployment of the Roman troops, the power struggle continued on the Temple Mount. Johanan of Giscala took advantage of the Passover festival to put his fighters in the Temple, which was under the control of Eleazar ben Simon. With weapons concealed beneath their clothing, they infiltrated among innocent worshippers. At the right moment, they threw off their outer garments, withdrew their weapons, and attacked Eleazar's men, as well as bystanders crouching near the altar, who were pushed toward the Sanctuary. Many of the bystanders were crushed. Eleazar's men fled to the underground passageways, leaving Johanan free to take over the Temple, with Eleazar forced to submit to Johanan's command (*War* V.98–105).

Of such bloody events, Josephus wrote, "I maintain that it was the sedition that subdued the city, and the Romans, the sedition — a foe far more stubborn than her walls" (*War* V.257).

***The Jews Set a Trap***

Titus wanted to move closer to the city, but the Jews continued their forays from the walls via tunnels dug from within the city. They attacked the Roman water-carriers and harassed the scattered task forces (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 65.4.5). Titus was forced to commit large numbers of soldiers to preventing the Jewish assaults.

Titus ... drew up the flower of his forces facing the northern and western portions of the wall, in lines seven deep: the infantry in front, the cavalry behind, each of these arms in three ranks, the archers forming a seventh line in the middle. The sallies of the Jews being held in check by this formidable array ... (*War* V.130–132).

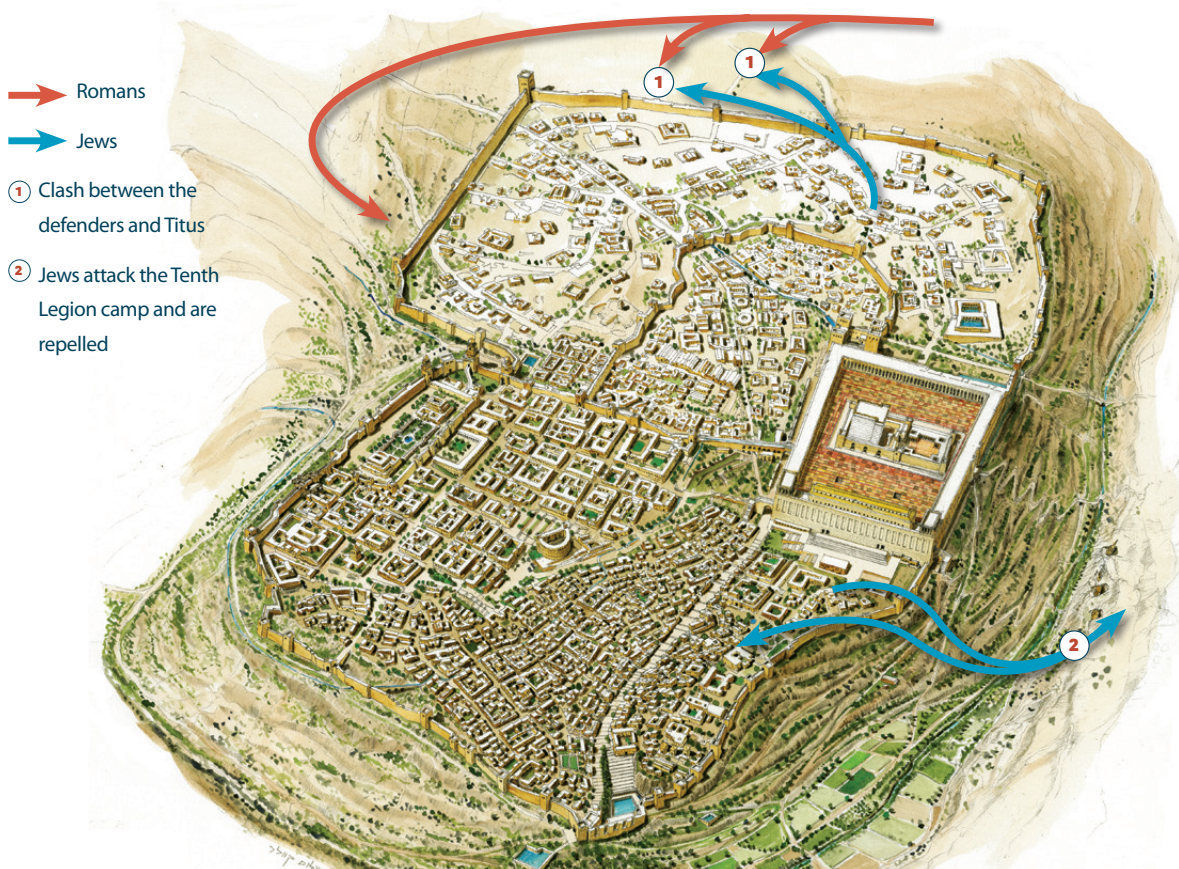
In addition, to prevent any possibility of a Jewish sortie from a hiding place or tunnel, Titus ordered his forces to level the area from Mount Scopus to the city wall. This took them four days.

Every fence and palisade with which the inhabitants had enclosed their gardens and plantations having accordingly been swept away, and every fruit tree within the area felled, the cavities and gullies on the route were filled up, the protuberant rocks demolished with tools of iron, and the whole intervening space from Scopus to Herod's monuments, adjoining the spot called the Serpents' Pool, was thus reduced to a dead level (*War* V.107–108).

Leveling the area and arranging the fighters in lines of infantry, cavalry, and archers finally isolated the zone of operations, stopped the Jewish sorties, and enabled the legions' supply caravans to get through. If until then the Jewish actions had been typified by surprise sorties outside the walls, from then on and until the Romans built their embankments opposite the Third Wall, the Jews focused mainly on attacks from the walls themselves.

During construction of the embankments, Titus proposed to the city's inhabitants, through Josephus, that they surrender, but the offer went unanswered (*War* V.114). The invitation to the inhabitants to seek terms would be reiterated numerous times during the siege of Jerusalem, indicating the difficulty the Romans were having with the siege. It should be noted that in places like Jotapata, which the Romans had thought they would take with relative ease, they did not suggest that the besieged surrender. The offers were made to weaken the fighting spirit in the city by creating dissent and a lack of will to continue the battle.

At one point, while the Romans were leveling the ground in front of the wall, they spied a group of Jews outside the gate near the Women's Towers on the northwestern side of the wall. Meanwhile, other Jews were seen on the wall calling out peaceful greetings to the Romans and throwing stones at the group outside the walls, which then made as if to try to go back inside the city. Titus suspected that this was a ruse to entrap his soldiers at the foot of the wall and ordered his men to stay put. However, a group of Roman soldiers who had been put in charge of protecting laborers involved in the earthworks imagined that this was a golden opportunity to strike at a group of



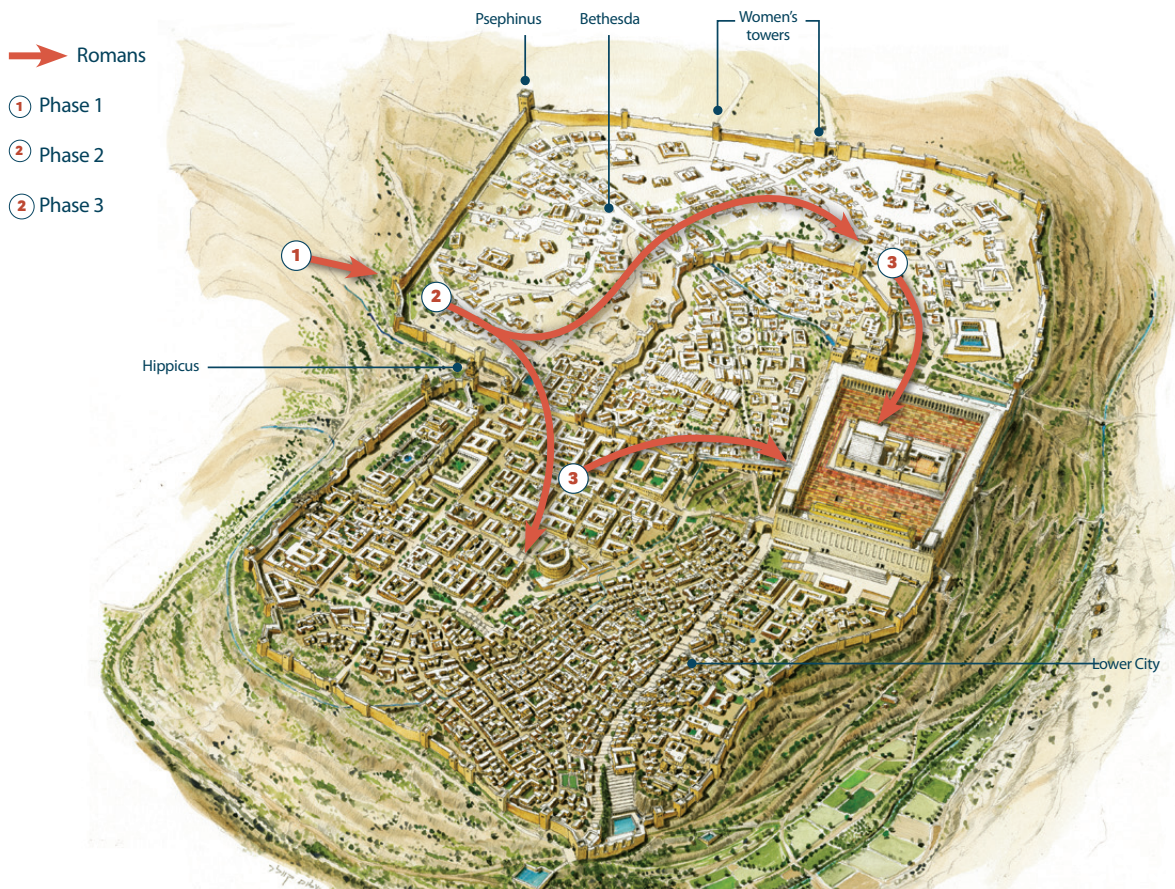
14 Nissan 70 CE, destruction of gardens and fruit trees – beginning of the siege

rebels at the foot of the wall, and even to enter the city with the help of the seemingly peaceful faction on the walls. The soldiers took their weapons and ran straight into the trap. Many were killed and most of the rest were wounded (*War* V.109–120).

Later, Titus rebuked the men who had allowed themselves to fall into the Jewish snare, saying, “These rash adventurers shall learn forthwith that, among Romans, even a victory without orders given is held dishonorable” (*War* V.125). And yet, Titus himself was to fall by a similar Jewish trick.

### *The Horrific Sound of the Battering Rams*

To select a location for his attack on the walls, Titus embarked on an inspection tour (*War* V.258). This patrol may have been a continuation of the reconnaissance attempt he made on the day he arrived in Jerusalem (*War* V.52). His conclusion was that topographical conditions made attack from the east or south impossible. But the northern line of the wall as far as the northwestern tower (Psephinus), and from there southward to where the wall met the Hippicus Tower, did allow access. Titus decided to concentrate his efforts on breaching the western side



Titus's plan to attack and conquer Jerusalem

of the wall, opposite the tomb of the High Priest John Hyrcanus.

Titus correctly recognized that to the Jews, the most vital area in the city was that of the Temple Mount and the Temple, and that the key areas for capturing the Temple were the Antonia Fortress north of the Temple Mount and the Upper City to the west. His plan therefore called for capturing these key areas and then proceeding to the Temple Mount.

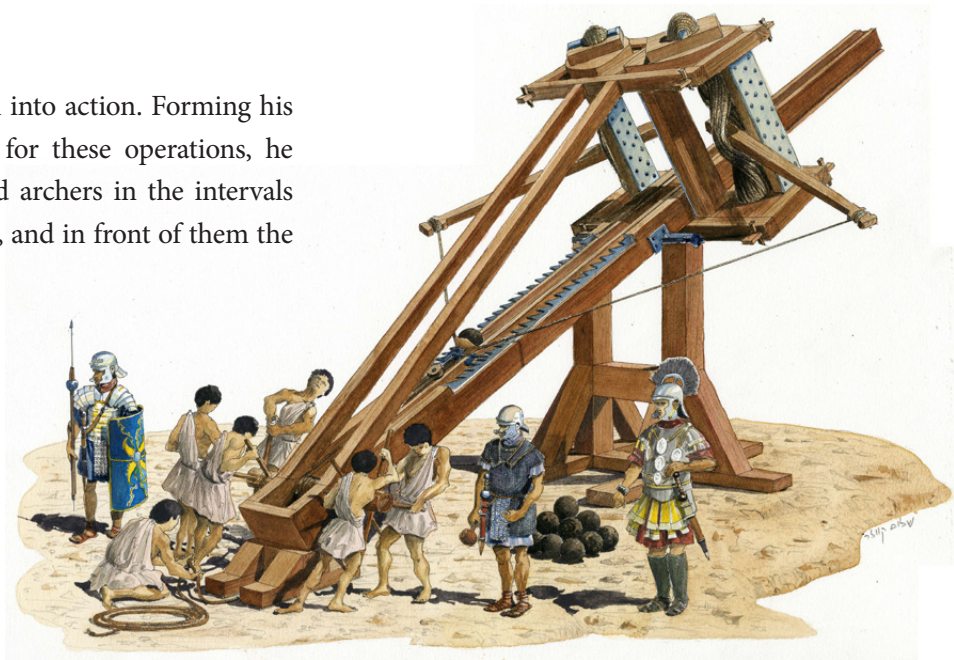
According to Josephus, Titus had planned to breach the Third Wall (whose construction had been hastily completed on the eve of the rebellion) at its lowest and weakest point. Once that was breached, the forces would split up. One contingent would turn south, break through the First Wall, and complete the conquest of the Upper City. A second contingent would advance and take the Antonia Fortress, and from there continue to the Temple Mount and the Temple (*War* V.260).

Titus began to put his plan into action. Forming his army into three divisions for these operations, he placed the javelin-men and archers in the intervals between the embankments, and in front of them the

quick-firers, catapults, and stone projectors, to check any sallies of the enemy against the works and any attempts from the ramparts to impede them (*War* V.263).

The javelin throwers and archers were supposed to repulse any immediate threat to the legionaries building the embankments. The quick-firers, catapults, and stone projectors were to subdue Jewish fire from the walls and keep potential rebel sorties at bay. Titus ordered the three legions (the Fifth, Twelfth, and Fifteenth), each responsible for its own area, to begin building the embankments on which the siege towers, ladders, iron-headed battering rams, and quick-firers would be placed. The purpose of the embankments was to create as high as possible a space from which to efficiently fire projectiles at the wall and at the hidden area behind it, as well as to allow placement of the ladders by which the troops

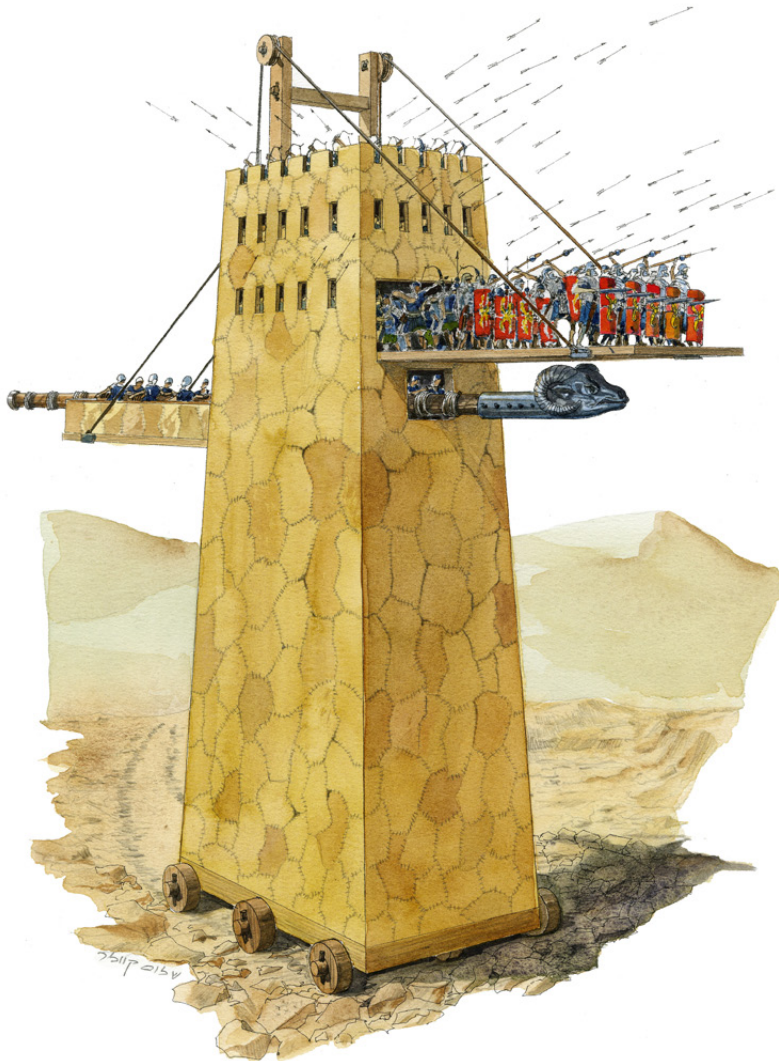
The ballista was designed to shoot stones weighing anywhere from 650 grams to several dozen kilograms.





would climb into the city. Despite the installation of the artillery within range of the wall, the Jews still managed to fire and even to emerge for face-to-face clashes with the Romans.

Simon placed his catapults — the ones captured from Cestius Gallus (*War* II.554) — and machines captured from the Roman garrison in the Antonia (*War* II.430) — on top of the wall and fired at the Romans building the embankments. But the Jews were inexperienced at operating these engines (*War* V.268), and moreover,



the Romans protected the laborers with hurdles made of reeds. Thus the Jews were unable to cause real damage. In contrast, Roman fire caused many Jewish casualties. Josephus notes particularly that the Tenth Legion's machines were magnificently constructed. This legion's ballistae could throw stones weighing 1 talent (about 26 kilograms) a distance of 370 meters (1120 feet).

After the Roman builders completed the embankments, the siege towers were brought forward and iron-headed battering rams, meant to bring down the walls with their powerful blows, were installed in them. Titus ordered all three legions to strike with the battering rams, with the assault thus coming from three directions. All of a sudden, Jerusalem resounded with the frightening din of battering rams, and the inhabitants were beset by terrible fear. With the all-too-tangible calamity approaching from the outside, the Jews finally made peace with each other. Aware of the danger, Simon and Johanan had to cooperate, and Johanan sent warriors to reinforce Simon's men. As Josephus described it:

The parties, consigning their hatred and private quarrels to oblivion, thus became one body, and lining the ramparts, they hurled from them showers of firebrands at the machines and kept those who were impelling the battering-engines under incessant fire. The more venturesome,

A combination siege tower: the upper part contains a bridge from which to storm the wall; the lower part has a battering ram.

dashing out in bands, tore up the hurdles protecting the machines, and falling upon the gunners, seldom through skill but generally through intrepidity, got the better of them (*War* V.279–280).

Titus sent horsemen and archers to push back the Jewish assault. The Romans had returned to their work when suddenly they were surprised by a powerful rebel sortie. Jewish fighters had taken advantage of a postern gate in the Hippicus Tower and charged the siege machines with firebrands. A fierce battle raged around the towers, with the Jews overcoming their adversaries and fire beginning to take hold of the machines. Again, Titus hurried to the spot with his cavalry and attacked the Jews, forcing them to retreat. One of the Idumean leaders was killed in this battle, his chest pierced by a Roman arrow, and his countrymen were overcome with grief. A Jewish fighter was captured in the fray and crucified outside the walls in the hope that the sight would lead the people to surrender (*War* V.290).

The Jewish fighters who were pushed back into the city used various ruses to hamper operation of the battering rams. They let down ropes to entangle the rams and smash them to the ground; they lowered wooden boards reinforced with metal to counter the blows of the rams (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*



Assault by a Roman auxiliary cavalry unit

65.4.4). In response, Titus built three siege towers 50 cubits tall (about 25 meters – 76 feet). The Romans, protected within the tops of the towers, fired from these positions and took control of the wall from above, preventing the Jews from standing on it and harassing them or conducting sorties. One night, one of the siege towers collapsed with a horrific din. The Romans were sure that Jewish fighters had infiltrated their camps, and a tumultuous panic ensued. Titus calmed his forces by explaining the reason for the noise, but it took quite some time for order to be restored.



The iron head of a battering ram.